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IS IT ART?

POST-IMPRESSIONISM

FUTURISM

CUBISM



Constantin Brancusi

Portrait of Mlle. Pogany

BY
J. NILSEN LAURVIK

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BY

J. NILSEN LAURVIK

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IS IT ART?

I believe that nothing happens arbitrarily either in nature or in Society. Nor do I believe there is anything absolutely useless either in the thought or in the acts of humanity.

Frequently where we see only perturbations, as in geological convulsions, there is only the harmonious development of a law; these perturbations are an element of progress and that is why I don't quite agree with certain of my colleagues who persist in judging the latest phase of the evolution of plastic expression from the fixed bias of a formulated criteria that does not take into consideration the past, nor looks into the future.

Since the appearance of this new manifestation in art I have been studying it, seeking its derivations, investigating the path it follows and whither it is going. It seems to me that this is what we should wish to know.

What this movement has realized up to the present time I regard as a secondary consideration, inasmuch as the works produced might in themselves be bad while the principles upon which they are based might be good and their final success merely dependent upon the appearance of a superior genius who would employ these principles expressively instead of haltingly. And one must not forget that all novelty creates alarm, even when expressed by a genius, and is always opposed by the old, established principles if for no other reason than that of self-preservation, the enemy of all change.

The marked tendency of this new art, as far as painting and sculpture are concerned, is retrogression, for it wants to revert to primitive art. However, this need not necessarily be scored against it for is it not true that we oftentimes take a step backward that we may have more space in which to accelerate our impulse forward and thus reach a greater distance? May not this be true of this movement? Time alone can tell.

At the head of this movement we find three personalities whose work is imbued with a certain originality, who are spontaneous and follow their own inclination. Behind them we see many walking in their footsteps in the vain belief that they accompany them; grotesquely burlesquing their work in the belief that they complete and carry it forward. These three personalities are Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh.

The revolt against the false idealism of the romantic school of painters in France, brought about in the latter half of the nineteenth century by the conquests of natural sciences, resulted in a glorification of realism that found a striking expression in the work of Courbet, Monet, Manet, and Degas. The intense hostility and fierce opposition aroused by these men in their quest of truth and the subsequent acceptance of their work by the public as well as by officialdom is now a matter of history and need not be rehearsed here. But there was one man who was more radical, more uncompromising, more fanatical in his search of the ultimate reality than any of the men who made up that glorious company of innovators known as the Impressionists.

His name was Paul Cézanne, friend and fellow-townsmen of Emile Zola, who hailed from Aix, in Provence, whence both went up to Paris to conquer

the world. Zola came, saw and conquered, becoming as much a part of Paris as the Eiffel Tower, but Cézanne they could not abide although they put up with Manet and even Claude Monet, and after a time he returned to the more amicable hills of Provence where he became the local enigma.

Cézanne is a primitive by nature and not by theory. His life, his education, the place in which he lived and his attitude toward art prove this. He led a simple life, always isolated. He was one of the most prominent members of the Impressionist group, though not one of the most active; he was opposed to all that meant school, going his own way, pursuing his own ideal.

Cézanne is not quite as original as some of his most ardent admirers would have us believe. In many ways his work recalls Greco, but I don't mean to imply that he consciously or unconsciously imitated him; rather, I believe it was more of a kinship of feelings and ideas than an imitation, though his admiration of the Spanish master is clearly shown by the numerous copies he made of him.

He became known first as a landscape painter and if his landscapes excited the ire of the critics, when they came to know him as a figure painter they accused him of profaning art. I find in him a notable spontaneity, a great sincerity, which may be due to his impotence no less than to his genius.

Like Strindberg in his later misanthropic years, he shut himself off from all intercourse with his fellow men, and year by year, in his two studios in Aix, he laboriously evolved the art that was finally to revolutionize the current conception of form. However, the world did not trace a path to his door although he was not wholly without honor. Huysmans is outspoken in his admiration of him and does not hesitate

to assert that Cézanne contributed more to accelerate the impressionist movement than Manet, and Zola dedicated to him his **Salons** which are now to be found in a volume of essays on art and literature bearing the provocative title of *Mes Haines*, and finally, in the year 1901, there was exhibited in the Champ de Mars Salon a picture by Maurice Denis entitled *Hommage à Cézanne*, after the well-known hommages of Fantin-Latour.

But it was left for a later generation to pay him the supreme compliment of imitation, obscuring his virtues and exaggerating his faults and he who was in his day rejected, despised and laughed off the artistic map of Paris has now forced upon him the doubtful honor of fathering this whole new movement in France, that has been labeled with the misleading misnomer: Post-Impressionism. As a matter of fact the men who are at the present moment engaging the attention of Paris and the art world in general have little or nothing to do with what is generally recognized as Impressionism and its exponents; rather, they are anti-Whistlerian, Pseudo-Primitives. If an appellation is needed I think Pseudo-Primitives will more truly characterize them than the confusing and irrelevant one now in general use. At all events it would be more nearly justified by the sources from which they derive their inspiration and artistic sustenance, which I think will be apparent to any one who examines these works in the light of what has been achieved in primitive art.

Cézanne was not alone a primitive at heart; he was a realist of the ultimate type. He reduced reality to its lowest denominator and in him realism achieved its culmination. His extraordinary eyes saw things as they actually are—not as we believe them to be from long-associated ideas of roundness or flatness

acquired through contact, and therefore there is something of the grotesqueness of stark truth in all his work. Its uncompromising verity appeals and repels, very much as does the naturalism of Zola. His still-life studies are the most concrete demonstration of this. Apparently distorted wilfully with the intent to astonish, they are as true to the actual appearance of things as a camera lens could make them.

No one so closely analyzed the play of light on surfaces and its effect on form as did Cézanne, and no one before him had the hardihood to put down what he saw with the same unflinching, literal-minded adherence to facts. When one remembers that, as far as form is concerned, most people see with their fingers instead of with their eyes it is not very difficult to perceive the reason for the universal misunderstanding that has grown up around his work.

For it is a fact well known to scientists that the conception of form is more largely dependent on the sense of touch than of sight and that a sphere, for example, appears flat to one who has not touched it. Therefore the idea of solidity and roundness thus gained by contact in early life is so elemental and pervasive as to remain a fixed and arbitrary criterion to which all and sundry conceptions of roundness conform involuntarily in the mind of the uncritical spectator. Only a very few persons can disassociate the appearance of things from the knowledge of their form and structure acquired through their sense of touch.

This differentiation of form has been for many ages the special province of the artist; he has noted the divergencies that distinguish the apple from the sphere, that give it its special and unique character as compared with an orange, for instance. In his researches into the true nature of form the artist has become ever more exacting in his endeavor to dis-

cover the most significant and expressive form: the one, in other words, that should most nearly approach the ultimate truth.

The whole progress of art is traced in this evolution of form, culminating, as far as realism is concerned, in Cézanne who got down to the bone of the matter in his final emphasis on the sub-structure of form. To him a sphere was not always round, a cube always square or an ellipse always elliptical. Thus the traditional oval of the conventional face disappeared in his portraits, the generally accepted round surfaces of a vase or bowl was represented as flat and dented in spots and the horizontal stability of the horizon was rendered elliptical whenever it so appeared to him.

The general truthfulness of his observations may readily be tested by any one of normal vision who will carefully observe the actual appearance of the surfaces of a round sugar bowl, for example, when placed in the light of a window. It will be found that certain planes are as flat as the table, that others present the appearance of dents and hollows, and the more clearly this is perceived the more grotesque will the object appear as compared with the preconceived image of it established in our minds by the unconscious interaction of the sense of touch and sight.

We know that scientifically regarded there is no such thing as a round surface, that what appears to be such is simply the closely adjusted juxtaposition of infinitesimal planes that are each perfectly flat. And the very fact that painters refer to the surface of a figure as *planes* is indicative of a partial recognition of this basic characteristic of structure. Nevertheless both artists and laymen persist in speaking of the roundness of a torso, for example, when in reality, if we could disassociate the *sense* of round-

ness from the *appearance* of roundness as did Cézanne, we would find large surfaces of spheroids quite flat. Therein lies the real secret of the art of Cezanne who is the first of realists.

This principle he developed and applied consistently in all its ramifications to the representation of form, which he worshipped with the fanatical zest of one intent on discovering the inherent truth in matter. But he only exposed its inner shell through which the real spirit of things struggles in vain to manifest itself.

He remained a literalist true to his abnormal, or shall we say excessively normal, sense of actuality. That is the quality of his art that at once attracts and repels. It lacks imagination; it is coldly geometrical, mathematically precise, and hence rigorously truthful in the sense that two and two make four. His still life pieces, his landscapes, his portraits have something of the intense and startling reality of naked truth. Whether painting a vegetable or a human being the one is treated with the same whole-souled absorption as the other.

Cézanne gave form concrete value, supplementing and correcting the researches of Monet into the nature of light and color. He was intent on conveying the depth, volume, and the bulk and mass of the universe that makes of it a tangible reality as opposed to the Whistlerian veil of mystery, tenuous, gauze-like and unreal that made of objects in the natural world a mere blur of pleasant color.

Thus his pictures became designs of closely organized planes, plastically treated, in which the color is an integral factor instead of being the pre-eminent or merely an incidental factor. In fact color was the basis of his design as he remarked in a letter to Emile Bernard, "Design and color are in nowise distinct;

in proportion that one paints, one designs; the more the color is harmonized, the more precisely is the design rendered." And he adds, "When the color reaches richness, form attains its fullness (plentitude). Contrasts and relations of tone—there is the secret of design and modelling." Hence his color approaches monochrome in which his practice coincides with the theory promulgated before him by Goya who was fond of saying that in nature color does not exist, everything is light and shade.

Thus it will be seen that the principles formulated by Cézanne were nowise revolutionary in character. It was his application of these principles that was new to the point of being startling. First of all he strongly affirmed the basic necessity of design as the fundamental element of all art. "The painter," he says in one of his illuminating letters, "makes concrete his sensations and perceptions by means of design and color." This, too, was in accordance with the past teaching of the schools; the novelty consisted in the fact that Cézanne actually carried it into practice with the utmost consistency, reducing form to an exact science in which he established the principle that form in nature is based upon the geometric figures of the sphere, cone and cylinder.

His re-discovery of this principle, which had been the animating spirit of art from the time when it emerged from a purely intuitive state into a condition of self-consciousness that perceived in geometry the key to the universe, his affirmation of this principle constituted his chief contribution to modern art.

Upon this solid foundation his fame rests securely and in due time his work will no doubt repose in the Louvre together with those other masters—the Venetians and the Spaniards—whom he venerated. Even now, only seven years after his death, he is regarded

by many of the most discerning spirits of our age as at least a demi-classic who had the root of the matter in him and therefore worthy to be ranked with the elect. He was perhaps the last great painter whose work has in it something of the grand manner, a certain severity of style that inevitably recalls El Greco and the Primitives with whom he has much in common. At all events it would seem that he carried realism to its ultimate limits and that art can go no further in this direction but must turn back upon itself or seek new channels of expression.

This is exactly what has happened in the person of Pablo Picasso, a Spaniard from Malaga, whose advent marks the parting of the ways. His whole tendency is a negation of the main tenets of the gospel of Cézanne whose conception of form he rejects together with Monet's conception of light and color. To him both are non-existent. Instead he endeavors "to produce with his work an impression, not with the subject but the manner in which he expresses it," to quote his confrere, Marius De Zayas, who studied the *raison d'être* of this work together with Picasso himself.

Describing his process of esthetic deduction further M. De Zayas tells us that: "He (Picasso) receives a direct impression from external nature; he analyzes, develops, and translates it, and afterwards executes it in his own particular style, with the intention that the picture should be the pictorial equivalent of the emotion produced by nature. In presenting his work he wants the spectator to look for the emotion or idea generated from the spectacle and not the spectacle itself.

From this to the psychology of form there is but one step, and the artist has given it resolutely and deliberately. Instead of the physical manifestation he

seeks in form the psychic one, and on account of his peculiar temperament, his psychical manifestation inspires him with geometrical sensations.

When he paints he does not limit himself to taking from an object only those planes which the eye perceives, but deals with all those which according to him constitute the individuality of form; and with his peculiar fantasy he develops and transforms them.

And this suggests to him new impressions, which he manifests with new forms, because from the idea of the representation of a being, a new being is born, perhaps different from the first one, and this becomes the represented being.

Each one of his paintings is the coefficient of the impressions that form has performed in his spirit, and in these paintings the public must see the realization of an artistic ideal, and must judge them by the abstract sensation they produce, without trying to look for the factors that entered into the composition of the final result.

As it is not his purpose to perpetuate on canvas an aspect of the external world, by which to produce an artistic impression, but to represent with the brush the impression he has directly received from nature, synthesized by his fantasy, he does not put on the canvas the remembrance of a past sensation, but describes a present sensation.....

In his paintings perspective does not exist; in them there are nothing but harmonies suggested by form, and registers which succeed themselves to compose a general harmony which fills the rectangle that constitutes the picture.

Following the same philosophical system in dealing with light, as the one he follows in regard to form, to him color does not exist, but only the effects

of light. This produces in matter certain vibrations, which produce in the individual certain impressions.

From this it results, that Picasso's paintings present to us the evolution by which light and form have operated in developing themselves in his brain to produce the idea, and his composition is nothing but the synthetic expression of his emotion."

Thus it will be seen that he tries to represent in essence what seems to exist only in substance. And, inasmuch as his psychical impressions inspire in him geometrical sensations, certain of these exhibits are in the nature of geometrical abstractions that have little or nothing in common with anything hitherto produced in art. Its whole tendency would appear to be away from art into the realm of metaphysics.

Here is a design, a pattern of triangles, ellipses and semi-circles that at first glance appears to be little more than the incoherent passage of a compass across the paper in the hands of some absent-minded engineer. After a little attentive study, however, these enigmatic lines resolve themselves into the semblance of a human figure and one begins to discover a clearly defined intention behind this apparent chaos of ideated sensations.

And when you have made this interesting discovery of this *something* that has the semblance of a human being you will also have discovered the inherent contradiction in this work which attempts to evoke an *impression* of an object by means of an objective rendering of it that makes the artist as much a slave to the model as was ever the old masters. Take their portraits, for example. There you will find an eye, the eye of the person depicted. And whether this eye is made diamond-shaped—with angles, in cubes—or round like an orb, what does it really matter? The essential idea and attempt is the same.

Thus one finds a number of these followers of Picasso making a desperate effort at abstraction by reducing all natural forms to a system of cubism, (than which there is nothing more concrete and mathematically matter-of-fact) and at the same time vainly retaining a slender hold on actuality by labelling this arbitrary arrangement of cubes with a concrete title such as "A Procession in Seville" or a "Souvenir of Grimalde, Italy," as does Mr. Picabia as well as Picasso, whose "Woman with a Pot of Mustard" is one of the most engaging puzzles of a very puzzling art. This is sharply emphasized by the delight and pride of every spectator who is successful in solving the puzzle by finding in these enigmatic charts some sort of a tangible, pictorial justification of the title appended thereto.

It will be seen therefore that the efforts of these men to give a subjective rendering of actuality results in nothing better than a poorly realized form of objectivity which is as much the creation of the spectator as of the artist, inasmuch as the vaguely adumbrated forms in the picture simply serve as a hint to that reality of which it is a wilfully distorted symbol, and the discovery of the "mustard pot" would scarcely have been possible without the happy cooperation of the title with the spectator's previous knowledge of the actual appearance of a mustard pot.

Without the intervention of the title and the association of ideas called forth thereby through the memory of past experiences with actuality these pictures would be totally meaningless even to the most recondite. They would inevitably be reduced to a personal system of short hand, an individual code as it were, comprehensible only to the originator.

Regarded from that viewpoint these enigmatic paintings and drawings may very possibly be alto-

gether successful. At all events it is only fair to assume that these works express to the originator what he intended them to express. But it is quite obvious that they express something quite different to the spectator who has not been initiated into the meaning of this personal form of shorthand, and the appending of an objective title to what is intended as a subjective impression of the actual world hardly help him over the difficulty. On the contrary it takes him just that far away from the impression the artist desires to produce, plunging him deeper into that world of reality out of which he was to be extricated by this new art, and there is no doubt that in the minds of even the most intelligent spectator it only serves to reenforce his conception of reality upon which he is forced to fall back by the objective titles as well as the concrete representations of what is supposed to be a subjective mood.

I think it may safely be said that in no case does this mood manifest itself to the persons to whom it is addressed, although by a process of auto-hypnotism a certain few no doubt succeed in making themselves believe that they penetrate the real inwardness of these arbitrarily individual mental processes. Granted that these very discerning ones do respond to the real intention of these abstractions it cannot be denied that this work is the most circumscribed in its appeal of anything so far produced in the name of art and, until its working premise is made clearer, its influence must be correspondingly limited. At present it appears to me to be a too purely personal equation to be intelligible to others than the artist himself and therefore, generally speaking, it can not be regarded as art, whatever else it may be.

For that that communicates nothing expresses nothing and as the office of art is first and last expres-

sion this new form is as yet outside of the domain of art. These artists remain searchers in the realms of science and methaphysics which they would annex to the domain of art which has become too circumscribed for their ambitious strivings after a more completely individual form of self-expression. As the Futurists say in one of their recent manifestos in which they proceed to formulate a new art creed :

“Our growing art,” it says, “can no longer be satisfied with form and color; what we wish to produce on canvas will no longer be one fixed instant of universal dynamism; it will simply be the dynamic sensation itself.

“Everything is movement, transformation. A profile is never motionless, but is constantly varying. Objects in movement multiply themselves, become deformed in pursuing each other, like hurried vibrations. For instance, a runaway horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movement is triangular. In art all is conventional, nothing is absolute. That which yesterday was a truth to-day is nothing but a lie.

“We declare, for instance, that a portrait must not resemble its model and that a painter must draw from his own inspiration the landscape he wishes to fix on canvas. To paint a human face one must not only reproduce the features, but also the surrounding atmosphere.

“Space no longer exists; in fact, the pavement of a street soaked by rain beneath the dazzle of electric lamps grows immensely hollow down to the centre of the earth.

“Thousands of miles divide us from the sun, but that does not prevent the house before us being incased in the solar disk.

“Who can believe in the opaqueness of bodies since our sensibilities have become sharpened and mul-

tiplied through the obscure manifestations of medium-nity?

“Why do we forget in our creations the double power of our sight with its scope of vision almost equal in power to that of X-rays?

“It will be enough to cite a few of the innumerable examples which prove our statements.

“The sixteen persons around you in a tramcar are by turn and at one and the same time one, ten, four, three, they are motionless yet change places; they come and go, are abruptly devoured by the sun, yet all the time are sitting before us and could serve as symbols of universal vibration. How often, while talking to a friend do we see on his cheek the reflection of the horse passing far off at the top of the street. Our bodies enter the sofa on which we sit and the sofa becomes part of our body. The tramway is engulfed in the house it passes and the houses rush on the tramway and melt with it. The construction of pictures has hitherto been stupidly conventional. The painters have always depicted the objects and persons as being in front of us. Henceforth the spectator will be in the centre of the picture. In all domains of the human spirit a clearsighted, individual inquiry has swept away the obscurities of dogma. So also the life-giving tide of science must free painting from the bonds of academic tradition. We must be born again. Has not science disowned her past in order better to satisfy the material needs of our day? So must art deny her past in order to satisfy our modern intellectual needs.

“To our renewed consciousness man is no longer the centre of universal life. The suffering of a man is as interesting in our eyes as the pain of an electric lamp which suffers with spasmodic starts and shrieks, with the most heart-rending expressions of color. The harmony of the lines and folds of a contemporary

costume exercises on our sensibility the same stirring and symbolic power as nudity did to the ancients.

“To understand the beauties of a futurist picture the soul must be purified and the eye delivered from the veil of atavism and culture; go to nature and to museums. When this result is obtained it will be perceived that brown has never circulated beneath our epidermis, that yellow shines in our flesh, that red flashes, and that green, blue and violet dance there with voluptuous and winning graces. How can one still see pink in the human face, when our life doubled by nocturnal life has multiplied our colorists’ perceptions? The human face flashes of red, yellow, green, blue, and violet. The pallor of a woman gazing at a jeweler’s shop window has rainbow hues more intense than the flashes of the jewels which fascinate her like a lark.

“Our ideas on painting can no longer be whispered, but must be sung and must ring on our canvases like triumphant fanfares. Our eyes, accustomed to twilight, will soon be dazzled by the full light of day. Our shadows will be more brilliant than the strongest light of our predecessors, and our pictures beside those in museums will shine as a blinding day compared to a gloomy night. We now conclude that now-a-days there can exist no painting without divisionism. It is not a question of a process which can be learned and applied freely. Divisionism for the modern painter must be inborn complementarism, which we declare to be essential and necessary.

“Our art will probably be accused of decadence or lunacy, but we shall simply answer that, on the contrary, we are primitives with quickened sensibilities, and that our art is spontaneous and powerful.”

The futurists proceed to make the following “declaration”:

That all forms of imitation must be despised and all forms of originality glorified;

That we must rebel against the tyranny, harmony and good taste, which could easily condemn the works of Rembrandt, Goya, and Rodin;

That art critics are useless or harmful;

That all worn-out subjects must be swept away, in order that we may have scope for the expression of our stormy life of steel, pride, fever, and swiftness;

That the name of madmen with which they try to hamper innovators, shall henceforth be considered a title of honor;

That inborn complimentarism is an absolute necessity in painting as free verse in poetry and polyphony in music;

That universal dynamism must be rendered in painting as a dynamic sensation;

That above all sincerity and purity are required in the portrayal of nature;

That movement and light destroy the materiality of bodies.

"We fight," say the signers of the manifesto.

Against the bituminous colors with which one struggles to obtain the patin of time on modern pictures;

Against superficial and elementary archaism founded on flat uniform tints and which, imitating the linear manner of the Egyptians, reduces painting to an impotent childish and grotesque synthesis;

Against the false avenirism of secessionists and independents, who have installed new academies as traditional as the former ones;

Against nudity in painting as nauseous and tiring as adultery in literature.

"Let us," the Futurists conclude, "explain this last question. There is nothing immoral in our eyes; it is the monotony of nudity that we fight against. It is said subject is nothing, and all depends upon the way of treating it. Granted. We also admit it. But this truth which was objectionable and absolute fifty years ago is no longer so to-day as to nudity, since painters beset by the longing to reproduce on canvas the bodies of their lady loves have transformed exhibitions into fairs of rotten hams! We require during the next ten years the total suppression of nudity in painting!"

And to demonstrate their complete freedom from

that petty consistency which is the bugbear of small minds, Marcel Duchamp, one of the most discussed exponents of futurism, though not officially affiliated with the main group, promptly presents us with a "Nude Descending Stairway" which looks for all the world like "an explosion in a shingle yard" as one observer aptly called it when it was shown in New York.

Out of this chaos of over-lapping flat planes that look like a pack of cards spread out, the spectator is supposed to resolve a "Nude Descending Stairway," which, by reason of its manner of presentation, is calculated to give one a sense of progressive motion such as the succession of images in a moving picture produce. But instead of a sense of movement one simply is conscious of a series of flat figures, one over-lapping the other, the sum total of which remains no less fixed than each separate unit and the attempt to achieve an illusion of motion without the concomitant physical and mechanical means employed by a moving picture results in an amusing failure, very entertaining as a new kind of parlor game but of very little value as art. But admitting that this kinetoscopic arrangement of surfaces does produce in the minds of certain spectators a sense of motion, it must be conceded that this, regarded as an end in itself, is a very puerile use of art and in no sense an amplification of its possibilities.

The Japanese long ago succeeded in solving this visual problem of movement in art, but with them it never degenerated into being practiced and accepted as an end in itself; it was only one of the means employed to give a heightened sense of the fluidity of life.

Moreover, if we of to-day desire to be thrilled by a vivid impression of motion we have only to face an onrushing express train coming toward us at top

speed, or if it requires a girating kaleidoscopic motion to stir our sensibilities into activity one needs only walk up Broadway (or any other main thoroughfare in the large cities of the country) of an evening and I venture to say you will be more be-dazzled in five minutes of concentrated attention on the moving electric signs than in an hour with the most extreme Futurist.

Certain of these vain strivings after originality are no doubt based upon the effects of color and motion produced in a kaleidoscope, and again one feels the absence of the particular quality that gives interest to the object copied, namely: the purity and transparency of color and the constantly changing pattern of color made by turning the kaleidoscope which is its chief charm and source of pleasure. In attempting to simulate this effect they have overlapped filmy veils of vivid color that of course remain fixed, arbitrary patterns and in nowise give one the sensations produced by a kaleidoscope.

This movement has gained its impetus largely from the very general revolt against materialism that is substituting a new individualism for the old realism and I have no doubt that some of these men are sincerely and earnestly trying to discover a new form that shall express with greater intensity the new feelings and emotions aroused in man by all the objects in the natural world. But I have even less doubt that a very large number of the men who are its chief pontiffs are moved by nothing more laudible than a desire for reclame and quick financial returns. They have so far been eminently successful in both, once more proving the truth of P. T. Barnum's well known dictum that: "The Public loves to be hum-buged" which recalls Camille Mauclair's delightful little story about the enterprising Palombaro, recently published in

“Comædia”. Palombaro is one of those heaven-sent geniuses whose inspired productions have made the fame and fortune of certain critics, collectors and discerning dealers, all of whom are sympathetically characterized by the gentle pen of Maublair in the following ironical account of an imaginary but very possible occurrence:

“Grondin, nervous and disheartened paced up and down his picture shop. Everything there was spic and span; but nevertheless he called the boy and ordered him to give everything a final touch. And in the nick of time he discovered that he had kept under his arm, through an old and useful, tho’ inelegant custom of his whilom profession, a napkin, of which he now quickly rid himself. Satisfied at last he glanced at the new violet rosette, which ornamented his lappel, and waited. — Grondin was about to receive a visit from a group of important admirers of a young Italian futurist, Giuseppe Palombaro, who were going to introduce to him the man and his works, which would honor his gallery by its being chosen among the many as a shelter for their exposition. A great affair, a big advertisement, large profits and new lustre for the firm of Grondin, already well known as the hotbed of coming genius!

The arrival was most imposing. Four automobiles stopped at the door, three taxis and one limousine. From the latter emerged first its owner, the celebrated collector, Alcide Gluant, then, Rutilant, the celebrated critic of priemeres, Matois the merchant, and finally Palombaro the master. From the other vehicles issued the members of the Committee of the International Exposition of the “Sans Principes”, who were to act as patrons for the Exposition of Palombaro’s pictures. They comprised the Englishman Green Cheese, the German Hundsfott, authorized representative of the

firm Pigson & Hundsfott experts, the Frenchman Exigut, the "wild" painter, whose tall figure dominated the group, a fat Turk named Chetif-bey, who popularized Cubism at Stambol, Pomposo, the little Milanese sculptor and the sallow Spaniard who was seen everywhere, of whom neither name nor picture was known, and of whom the only thing known was that he descended from Greco by his women folks. And these different people hurriedly put down a number of pictures which had been brought by them in the taxis and arranged them in order whilst Grondin heaped compliments upon Rutilant, Gluant and Palombaro. The face of the latter piqued him without his knowing why, and in his stubborn memory he kept comparing it with vague recollections.

But he must examine the pictures. The Committee was ranged before them in silence. It seemed as if upon the walls of the gallery there had suddenly been arranged squares of fayence-ware of many colors for the decoration of a shower bath in an insane asylum. Assuredly nothing like it had ever been seen before and the effect was immense. Rutilant, who was going to write the preface, shook his fist and gnawed at his mustache. He had dined well at Gluant's and his face was flushed.. Finally he burst out:

"Good Lord; how beautiful it is. Where is the man who will not think that beautiful?"

He certainly was not present, for these gentlemen delivered themselves of the following opinions:

"Perfect," said Exigut.

"Collosal," said Hundsfott.

"Soave!" piped Pomposo.

"Very good," acquiesced Cheese.

"That will fetch big prices," murmured Matois.

Chetif-bey and the descendant of Greco were moved

but silent. Alcide Gluant touched Rutilant's shoulder and said maliciously:

"What? My dear friend and to think that we wasted time supporting Monet and Renoir. Well, we were young then."

"Pooh!" answered Rutilant. Those were only vain stammerings compared to these marvels, but at that time it was something new. When one is independent from birth and a discoverer of genius, remember gentlemen one must always be discovering something. A discoverer, who does not discover anything more, is only fit to be thrown to the dogs. As for me, I have discovered something every year for the last thirty years, and have not finished yet. I arrogated this public duty to myself."

"And it is yours by right of genius," insinuated Gluant.

"Do not exaggerate, my dear friend; but having mixed myself up with art-criticism, I should have preferred to be a scavenger rather than fall into the torpid idiocy of the Fromentins, the Charles Blancs and the Theophile Gautiers and other ignoramuses. I have accomplished my difficult and beneficent task because I was the only judge of art of my century. I managed the cudgel, the necessary cudgel... I am sensitive and have a feeling of integrity, that is all. And now Monsieur Grondin, I am going to write a preface for you which I intend shall be a thundering one, do you understand? I count on you to receive the Assistant Secretary of State, as he deserves to be. It certainly is to laugh or to howl if one believes that such people are still needed, but what can one do? Noble Anarchy reigns as yet only in paintings... I hope that you will teach this gentleman a lesson and that he will buy at least one of these masterpieces for

the Luxembourg, to make up for all the dirty stuff put there. You are not going to let him bluff you?"

"Oh, no," said Grondin, the Assistant Secretary of State is really very nice. He comes here sometimes to see what is going on. Yesterday he even spoke to me of Delacroix..."

"They still talk of that! What fossils!" exclaimed Rutilant, slapping his thighs with his strong hands covered with red hair.

General hilarity followed. Chetif-bey whispered in Hundsfott's ear:

"I did not understand..."

"They are speaking of the old man who painted the massacres of Scio..."

"Oh, yes," said Chetif-bey, "you would have had more work at Adana..."

"Then," continued Grondin, "I answered: 'But Mr. Assistant Secretary of State, you know... they don't give a rap for Delacroix. Delacroix didn't know beans about designing...' He looked astonished, but nevertheless he did not dare strike back... I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I mean to say..."

"No, no, Grondin," took up Rutilant, "I like the old realistic saying. I see that Mr. Palombaro's interests will be in good hands here, don't you think so, gentlemen? And there will be a crowd and the common people will bray, and it will be a fine victory for all of us and for the international exposition of the 'Sans-Principes'. By Jove! One is independent or one is not. There will be a fight and the day will come when all their dirty museums, which are strongholds of obscurantism will be set on fire. There will be nothing, nothing else left but free art!"

"My dear friend," softly said Gluant, "there will remain the private collections..."

"And, we, the dealers," whispered Matois to

Hundsfoth. "He is a surprising fellow, is Rutilant. Nevertheless we are able to compel the critics..."

"Never mind," answered Hundsfoth, "Rutilant always gets excited, but he is a friend; he understands; he brings me quite some people..."

"Gentlemen," cried Rutilant, "hurrah for Palombaro."

After this cry, repeated by all present, the meeting was adjourned and everybody proceeded to the door. Grondin conducted them, charmed, profusely distributing his smiles and handshakes. When he returned, he noticed that the futurist had remained. Up to now Palombaro had not uttered one word; Grondin looked at him curiously. The painter, undisturbed, correct, smiled from the corners of his carefully shaven thin lips.

"You doubtless wish to speak of some material details?" said Grondin... "I am at your disposal, now that these gentlemen... but you see I cannot tell why, but I have a persistent impression of having met you, of having known you before..."

"That must date," said Giuseppe Palombaro quietly, "from the time when, before establishing yourself as a dealer of paintings and before not giving a rap for Delacroix, you were restaurateur on the Place Cambronne. — Not a restorer... of paintings..."

"In fact I... I.. but I prefer that this..."

"There is no harm in that, Mr. Grondin; you had a fine house, well recommended, and a very renowned Villaudric claret. It was the latter which caused our disagreement. I took a trifle too much of it, and you put me out. Only, if you had artistic aspirations, so had I... now don't faint, Mr. Grondin. At that time a black beard covered my whole face, American style, and that is why you do not recognize me... I am Joseph, your former dishwasher. Well, you see, I had

already daubed some, but when I got to Milan I started to paint. After having tossed about, I finally got a job there at a spaghetti merchant's and it was there that the idea struck me. My technique? Why it was the spaghetti, colored. The advance guard painting is not so very difficult; I learned the jargon, I saw some cubists and I chose a 'nom de guerre'; Giuseppe sounds better than Joseph, and Palombaro means 'plongeur' (diver, a slang name for dishwasher). I slipped in and, luck helping me, in two seasons . . . there you are . . ."

Grondin remained dumbfounded. Palombaro continued quietly.

"I speak Italiano, but nevertheless when one comes from Granelle, it is for all one's life. I was born to succeed, I was. You see how simple it is; there are more unusual things. You and I understand each other perfectly; it is to our interest to say nothing about this; especially to Rutilant. He poses as an anarchist, that fellow . . . 'A Dishwasher, who Became a Great Painter', would be a capital subject for a smashing article for him: the people here, and the right to beauty there and all . . . such rot. As if, at the 'Independents', they had not a little of everything: Custom house officers, counter jumpers, janitors, who amuse themselves with painting... hah! that would't do at all. You have a very 'chic' gallery, I want to be 'chic', and as to the people, oh piffle! Therefore, both for you and me, it is better to keep mum, don't you think so, Mr. Grondin? . . ."

The most consistent, if not successful, of all these attempts at abstraction are no doubt the "Improvisations" by Wassily Kadinsky, who has had the good sense to abandon all idea of representation in his pictures as well as in the titles. He is content to let color alone serve his purpose and this is apportioned and

juxtaposed in various formless masses according to his conception of its emotional value.

It may be anything under heaven or earth that you wish to imagine it but he creates neither boundary posts nor sign posts. He takes you into the *Terra Incognita* of art and if you get lost that is your own lookout. And after you have thought of everything under heaven and earth and found it unrelated to Mr. Kadinsky's picture you finally think of nothing whatever, and that perhaps is the artist's real triumph inasmuch as his work is a negation of all the elements hitherto regarded as essential components of a work of plastic art.

He attempts to produce with color the sensations produced by music. As far as I am concerned he fails and I think he is bound to fail with most people, for I believe the sensations produced by these two arts are as distinct and separate as are the organs of sight and hearing, notwithstanding Ruskin's poetic characterization of architecture as "frozen music," which in itself is as anomalous and paradoxical as the present attempts of certain men to substitute one art for another.

Generically, these two arts—music and the plastic arts—are at variance with each other, and what gives life to the one is the death of the other. The first is fluent and transitory while the latter is static and enduring. Music does not begin to exist until it has been liberated and its very being is a dying and when it is finished it is ended, while plastic art begins to exist only when it has become fixed in paints or clay and every stroke that contributes towards its completion gives it a more fixed and permanent character, therefore kaleidoscopic art is as anomalous as "frozen music."

One might easily pursue these essential differences

further but this is sufficient, I think, to show the prime fallacy underlying all these vain efforts to attain the effects of one art by means of another. To be sure, we know that red enrages a bull, as we are confidently told by advocates of this method of musical color notation, and that certain colors have been found to have a soothing and even therapeutic effects upon invalids and the insane, but these effects are obtained through optical, not aural sensations and one might with as much reason substitute an omelet for a sonnet, simply because we know that sensations are received thro' the sense of touch and taste as to pretend that an "Improvisation" by Kadinsky is the emotional equivalent of an "Improvisation" by Liszt. Shut your eyes and note what becomes of the music of Kadinsky. From this it follows that the attempt to ignore or transcend the forms imposed upon every art by its inner necessity usually ends in nullity.

And something similar happens when a man tries by main force to wrench himself free of the time in which he lives, as is evident in the work of many of the most "advanced" artists of to-day.

Just as the concrete, matter of fact realism of Cézanne has been converted into a system of involved geometrics simply because somewhere he said that form is based on the geometric figures of the sphere, cone and cylinder, so the primitive and very sincere romanticism of Van Gogh and Gauguin has been productive of all sorts of childish exaggerations that only parody the defects of these innovators without achieving any of their virtues.

The genesis of Gauguin was altogether different from that of Cézanne. To begin with he was nurtured in the Academy, and he made his debut as an Academic draughtsman of the purest and best defined style. Later his spirit underwent an evolution, due to the

contagion he suffered when he came in contact with the Pre-Columbian art of South America, and with the art of the Tahiti Islands, upon which he lived a long time and in which I find a great deal of the savage.

And this man, who had been taught in the ways of the Academy, could say in later life when he had found himself that "To know how to draw is not to draw well," and that "the greatness of the masters of art does not consist in the absence of faults; rather, their mistakes are different from those of the ordinary artist." This came to be very true of his own work in which one finds an absence of copying. Instead he devoted himself to rendering the subjective impression and the large, decorative aspect of the subject that appealed to him.

The so-called faults of drawing he ignored as inconsequential and not because of a lack of ability. He seeks a certain monumental effect and to that end he sacrifices the truth of actuality, wherein one may find strong bonds of kinship with Puvis Chavannes whom he admired equally with Cézanne.

His color sense is as personal as either of these masters, but more sensuous and exotic perhaps, while his predilection for the primitive art is no less natural and instinctive. He, like Cézanne, was drawn to it by an inner compulsion and not by any extravagant desire to appear different.

Both of these men impressed upon their work something of the character of their own physiognomy, producing something at once individual and yet related to the main evolution of art. From the method followed by these two painters comes the name I have applied to their art and that of their followers: primitive art, because of its tendency to go back to the

beginning. Hence a few observations on primitive art may be in place here.

The people who appeared at the dawn of civilization cultivated the arts, not as they wished, but as they could. They had neither masters nor antecedents and they copied nature without being able to interpret nature, nor even to faithfully reproduce it, because they lacked the most indispensable elements. Drawing was limited to the simple line, and later when they began to use color their paintings were monochromes; when they finally arrived at polychronism this was imperfect and crude; and as they still remained ignorant of the laws of perspective their figures appear all in the same plane upon a flat background.

The psychology of a race is identical to the psychology of the individual; the intellectual development is just as gradual in one as in the other. Look at the drawing spontaneously made by a child and compare it with those made by the artists of the primitive races. In both of them we will find the silhouette, the line more or less clumsy, but not lacking in intention. This is quite universal and common to all humanity in that particular state of development, finding a more or less identical expression in Aztec drawings and Egyptian drawings which have led certain ethnologists and archaeologists to establish anthropological affiliations.

Appearances have led them into error. They have not considered that humanity is the same wherever it is found and follows the same laws in its development. To establish affiliations simply because one finds that two races have developed their arts through the same methods and that there are resemblances in their work, is as reasonable as to pretend to establish the same affiliations because it may be observed that in both races children begin by crawling, later they learn to

stand, then to walk and finally to run. This evolution of motion corresponding to the physical evolution is not a patrimony of a certain race but of humanity.

The same thing happens with the psychological evolution, and consequently the same happens also with the esthetic evolution, which proceeds from the simple to the complex, from the line to the composition, from the note to the melody and from the melody to the harmony. The evolution which takes place in each individual is a synthesis, in the material as well as in the psychological domain, of the evolution of each race, and even of all humanity.

To take primitive art as a model or even "as a point of departure," as our present-day Pseudo-Primitives are fond of saying, seems to me as illogical as to take as a model of locomotion the way a child transports itself by crawling. I repeat that the primitives drew and painted as best they could and not as they wanted to just as the child walks as he can and not as he wants to. And therefore I can not bring myself to believe that the realization of our present-day artistic ideals can be sought in good faith in the archives of primitive times.

With the exception of one or two men like Picasso I feel that what these Pseudo-Primitives of the present are seeking is novelty, something that will break what has already been consecrated, to compel attention with the extraordinary even if they have to fall into extravagance. It does not seem to me that this is the logical consequence of progress in general and of painting in particular, because I do not see in it anything that signifies advancement, either in its technique or in its arguments, neither in the impression it tries to produce nor in the ideas it tries to awaken.

I do not see that this reversion to primitive art can be the natural result of the slow and laborious

evolution which has been operating in painting through long centuries. But I have to admit that humanity, at present, finds itself shaken by a terrible neurasthenia which unbalances its spirit in general, and particularly in art. And in these chaotic social conditions may perhaps be discovered the underlying cause of all the unrest that has found such a perverse and disconcerting expression in art.

However, I feel very strongly that this whole movement obeys the spirit of imitation, and that most of those painters and sculptors who are to-day regarded as the most original and revolutionary of all, have simply discovered a fruitful source of inspiration in the works of the primitive races and much that appears so startling, such as the sculpture of Brancusi, of Maillol, Archipenko, and Lembruck, as well as the painting of Matisse, is very closely related to primitive African art and primitive Greek and Etruscan art. Brancusi's much discussed portrait of "Mlle. Pogany" as well as his "Une Muse" is obviously related to the fine art of ancient Benin and to early Greek primitive sculpture.

This indebtedness to the past is very apparent in the work of Henri Matisse who of all these men is the one who has given the greatest impetus to this movement. Like Gauguin he was an academic draughtsman of the most approved type, saturated with the principles of the schools. After the exhibitions held a few years ago of Cézanne's paintings he saw a new light and changed his whole style of painting; gathering all the energies of his indisputable talent and forcing them into the service of the new ideal he shot into instant prominence in the artistic firmament.

If Cézanne is a descendant of Greco by artistic affiliations and Gauguin from the South American and

Tahiti primitives, the art of Matisse seems to be of Etruscan and Persian origin. The resemblance of his work to the specimens of Etruscan art in the Museum of the Louvre, with which he is very familiar, shows this.

The painters and sculptors of this new movement appear to wish to do in their art what they have seen accomplished in other manifestations of the fine arts, namely: what Wagner did in Music, what Ibsen did in Dramatic Literature, what Rodin did in Sculpture, what Tolstoi, did in the Novel, what Mæterlinck, Nietzsche and other thinkers have realized in their different fields.

But it seems to me that they forget that these revolutionaries are "true personalities" and that they have worked spontaneously; that they have not walked backwards; that they have not sought the ideal outside of themselves, but in their own souls, and have carried it within themselves, as the torrent does not seek motion, but carries it within itself and communicates it. In the work of these men there is not premeditation, but inspiration. They do not especially desire to break with anything or anybody, but they are consequent with their own spirit.

Now individuality is that quality particular to a thing or person by which it is known and singularized. That being the case it follows that it is not transmissible. This person who has the gift of individuality is original, for this originality is just what characterizes it, and one of the conditions of originality is its spontaneity, which is not sought, but is wholly unconscious, a kind of trade mark that nature has impressed in the individual to establish his differential.

Those who follow the original man as disciples are nothing but counterfeiters of that trade mark, and as they lack the genius of the master, in their avidity

for originality, they imitate and exaggerate his defects without assimilating his virtues, and they fall into ridicule and die in oblivion.

These disciples do not understand that in the master, in the original man, there exists a close relationship between the defects and beauties of his work, as if they would complete each other, or as if they would complete his individuality. This is the very thing the followers of any master have not understood, and least of all those who follow the trail of Cézanne and Gauguin, and their vain endeavors to walk in the footsteps of these two masters of modern art has resulted in a multiplication of such confusion and futility as we have scarcely ever seen before in the whole history of art.

However, it is quite possible that many of these men proceed in good faith, with a deep conviction that they are on the right path, that they are redeeming art and enlightening Humanity, and like Don Quixote they establish the Golden Age in the past and not in the present nor in the future. But it occurs to me to ask: Is not Art a manifestation of the spirit of the epoch in which it is produced, and must it not correspond to the hopes, doubts, sufferings and ideals of that epoch? If so, do these sentiments make us regret the past and oblige us to look into the future and to struggle for it?

To my understanding the further removed we are from the past by time, the further we are from it in our manner of being. The form of man has modified itself, and his senses and his organs of perception have suffered the same modifications. It seems to me quite impossible that we should see and regard Nature to-day in the same way that, not only the primitive men but those of the last century, saw and regarded it.

The great phenomena of Nature no longer are to

us expressions of the anger of Heaven; nor do we regard epidemics of Disease as the visitations of the Gods; nor are the natural forces of the universe represented by Gods. The people of to-day do not feel like the men of yesterday; life reacts differently upon them; they have not the same aspirations, nor the same preoccupations. No, even the atmosphere of to-day is not the same as that of thousand years ago, scientists tell us.

What will be the result of all these attempts to recreate a new art out of the art of a period so remote that we can hardly envisage the circumstances of its creation? It is quite impossible to predict. We must consider the chief exponents of this movement as investigators and not as expounders of new doctrines, and their chief service to their generation may well consist in their revelation of the fact that what has hitherto been regarded as belonging solely to the domain of anthropology must henceforth be considered also as art and that the latter is always conditioned by the state of civilizations in which it is produced. And after all, this movement which appears to us so anomalous and orderless may be the precursor of something we are as yet unable to suspect. What it seems to lack is the crystallizing force of a superior genius who will bring into solution all these contrary elements, who will pronounce the *Fiat Lux* that shall bring order out of chaos.



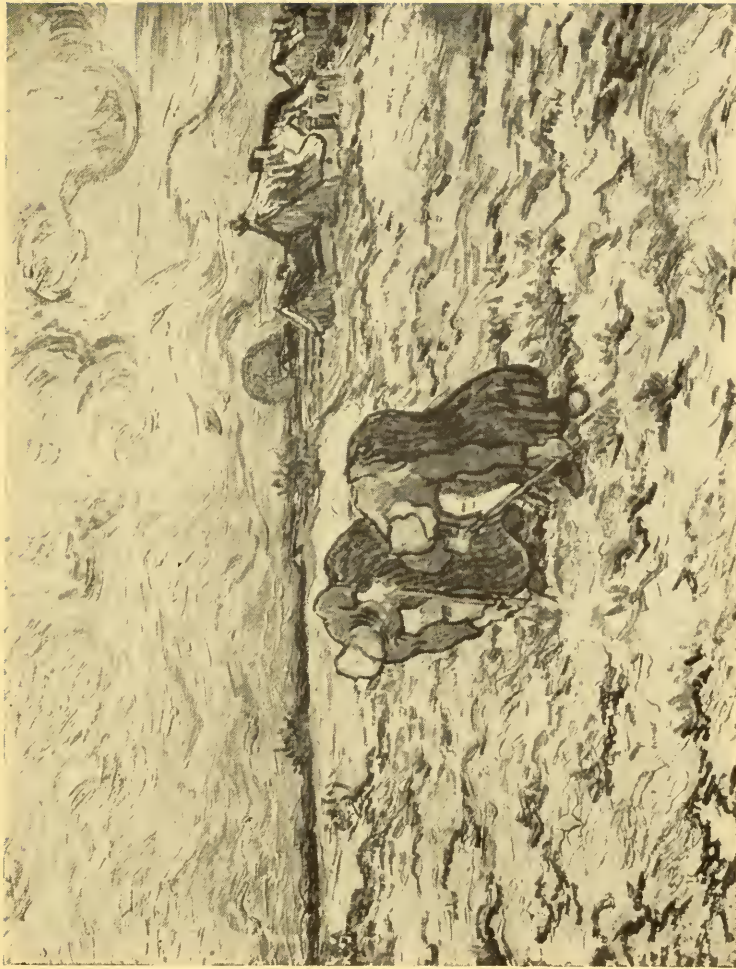
Paul Cézanne

Woman with Rosary



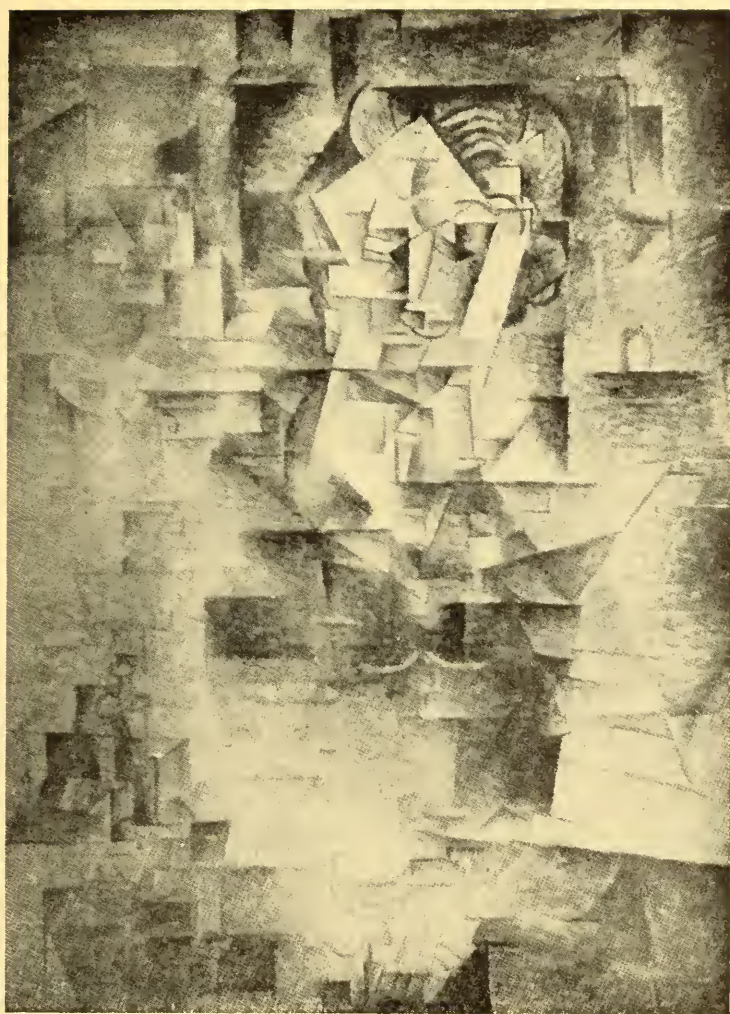
Paul Gauguin

Sous les Palmiers



Vincent Van Gogh

The Potatoe Diggers



Pablo Picasso

Portrait of M. Kahnweiler



Henri Matisse

La Madras Rouge



Marcel Duchamp

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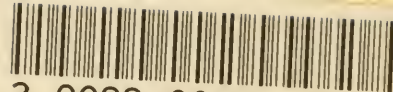
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